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## Additional Observations on the Birds of the Lake McConaughy Region

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#### **ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIRDS OF THE LAKE McCONAUGHY REGION**

Since the publication more than five years ago (*NBR*, 52:26-35, 1984) of an earlier list of the birds of the North Platte Valley between Oshkosh and Keystone, many new records have been obtained. Additionally, since 1982 Dr. Charles Brown of Yale University has spent every summer doing ornithological fieldwork in the area, and has kindly contributed many of his observations. This abundance of new information appears to warrant some additions and modifications to the original list, most of which simply involve changes in occurrence or status information for previously recorded species. However, three previously unreported species have also been observed (those species listed here by scientific as well as vernacular names), resulting in a total list of 247 species reported for the area in less than 20 years, making this area one of the richest documented areas for bird life in the entire state. By comparison, the 1984 bird checklist for Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge consists of 273 species observed over nearly 50 years, and the 1974 bird checklist for Valentine National Wildlife Refuge consists of 231 species observed over about 40 years.

Additions and changes in status are as follows:

Common Loon. Summering birds in non-breeding to varying degrees of breeding plumage have been observed in June during most years and to as late as 10 July, as well as occurring sporadically during August, on Keystone and McConaughy Lakes. Thus the species now appears to be a regular non-breeding summer visitor.

Pied-billed Grebe. Summering but apparently non-breeding birds on Lake Ogallala were observed during June and July in 1985, 1988 and 1989.

*Clark's Grebe* (*Aechmophorus clarkii*). A specimen of this recently recognized species was found dead on Lake Keystone during June of 1986 (*NBR* 54:64, 1986). Non-breeding birds of this species or the Western Grebe usually summer on Keystone and Ogallala Lakes.

Double-crested Cormorant. Late spring or summering birds have been seen

in late June and early July on Ogallala and Keystone Lakes during several summers.

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*). A pair with a well-grown brood was seen on Three-mile Lake, Arthur County, during early July, 1989. A single adult-plumaged bird was also observed on nearby Swan Lake during the same period. Although outside the limits of the immediate North Platte Valley, these unusual records seem worth noting here.

Snow Goose. Latest spring record 9 May (Charles Brown).

Canada Goose. Breeding has occurred at the west end of Lake McConaughy during several recent summers.

Redhead. Latest spring record, 25 June.

Hooded Merganser. One additional summer record, June 14, 1989; three female-plumaged birds on the North Platte near Keystone.

Osprey. Earliest spring record 22 April (Charles Brown).

Bald Eagle. An apparent nesting attempt close to Highway 26 and the north shore of Lake McConaughy reportedly occurred in Garden Co. during 1987 and 1988 (*NBR* 56:47-48).

Northern Goshawk. One additional record, 27 April, 1989 (Charles Brown).

Peregrine. One additional record, 25 April, 1989, at Lake Ogallala (Charles Brown).

Piping Plover. Nesting has been attempted during most summers at Martin Bay, Lake McConaughy, but has rarely succeeded because of fluctuating water levels and human disturbance. One nest hatched three young in 1985. Territorial birds have also been reported along the South Platte near Ogallala. Rather surprisingly, Least Terns have not yet been documented in this area, although suitable habitat seemingly exists.

American Avocet. Latest spring record 16 June. Probable breeding by this species, as well as Willet, Black Tern, Forster's Tern and other marsh-adapted species occurs not far to the north of the Platte Valley in the little-studied marshes of northeastern Arthur County, based on cursory surveys in 1989.

Caspian Tern. Non-breeders were observed during June and July on Lake Keystone during 1986 and 1989, with a maximum of six seen 20 June 1989. Earliest spring record 23 April (Charles Brown).

Black Tern. Earliest spring record 20 April (Charles Brown).

Common Poorwill. Earliest spring record of calling 18 April (Charles Brown; this is also the earliest state record of which I am aware); latest record of calling 8 July. Breeding certainly occurs in the immediate vicinity of Cedar Point, judging from the frequency of spring calling, but has not yet been documented.

Red-bellied Woodpecker. Heard calling in the vicinity of Cedar Point, June, 1989 (Brent Nickol).

Western Wood-Pewee. Heard singing 25 June, 1985; also seen at Cedar Point 3 July 1989 (Charles Brown); nesting observed at Ash Hollow, 28 June 1987.

Say's Phoebe. Nesting by a single pair was observed from 1982-1987 at Whitetail Creek, near Keystone (Charles Brown). A single bird was observed near Arthur Bay, 15 June 1989.

Eastern Kingbird. Earliest spring record 3 May (Charles Brown).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Several observations of this species were made by field station personnel during the summer of 1984, including one near Keystone, 21 August, 1984 (Charles Brown).

Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*). Observed near Cedar Point Biological Station on 8 July, 1987, and on 29 April, 1989 (Charles and Mary Brown).

Gray Catbird. Status changed from transient to local breeder (nested 1984). Earliest spring record 12 May (Charles Brown).

Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Earliest spring record 12 May (Charles Brown).

Blue Grosbeak. Earliest spring record 3 May (Charles Brown).

Indigo Bunting. Now known to be a local breeder around Cedar Point Station, where territorial males (and hybrids with Lazuli Buntings) have been regular in recent years.

Dickcissel. Originally judged to be only local and sporadic; this species has become surprisingly common and widespread in the past few years, especially around Keystone.

Chipping Sparrow. Earliest spring record 29 April (Charles Brown).

Orchard Oriole. Earliest spring record 8 May (Charles Brown).

House Finch. First observed in the Kingsley Dam area during the summer of 1985.

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